

Namur, Once Pioneer Door County Post Office, Selected for Site of National Belgian Village

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NAMUR, Wis. — You may never have heard of this place. That's understandable; until fairly recently, neither had many of the inhabitants.

But you will.

Namur (Wis.) isn't even on the map — not yet. Official wheels are turning, however.

To relieve the suspense, the future Namur is now known locally as Fairland, a widening on the east side of Highway 57 in southern Door County: A church, a store, a couple of taverns, a few houses, and little more.

When dreams have materialized, Namur will become internationally noted as the site of the National Belgian Village.

H. J. (Hank) Quartemont, a native of the area who does public relations work, gave voice to some of the dreams the other night in Alexander's Hall, which is a big

room to the rear of one of the taverns. Seventy-five or so men and women, mostly of Belgian descent, were there.

Pledge of \$150,000

Hank Quartemont told them about plans for the Village. Already begun, he said, are preliminary paper details on a home for the elderly. For a start, one man has pledged to contribute \$150,000.

The dreams picture a good deal more: A museum to preserve the history of Belgian immigrants who settled not only in this community, but throughout the United States . . . A Belgian cuisine; a shop stocked with authentic Belgian art and souvenirs; a pioneer farm.

Perhaps a College

Maybe even, enthused Quartemont, a small college.

Naming the community Namur actually will be turning back the pages of history. Ar-

chives in Washington show that the name was applied to the Post Office that functioned here for some 25 years prior to 1905.

Belgians from the Province of Namur had begun settlement in this area in the 1850's, hacking farms and hewing homes out of the forested wilderness.

In those days the sturdy pioneers trudged the lonely 30-odd miles to Green Bay, and as many back, mailing their occasional letters and returning with cherished missives from relatives left in the Old Country.

It was a great day, without doubt, when a Post Office materialized in the community. The date, according to information furnished by the National Archives and Records Service to John W. Byrnes, Eighth District congressman, was June 14, 1872. Clement Geniesse, a mer-

chant, was the first postmaster.

The Post Office was named Namur. Presumably this was done at the suggestion of Geniesse, in honor of his homeland.

John H. Draise, a native son now employed in official Washington, has supplied additional details to the Belgian Village organizers.

Checking the U. S. Official Postal Register, Draise learned that Geniesse (the name was spelled Genessee) served as postmaster until 1889. His annual compensation, based on postal receipts, ranged from \$12 to \$62.30.

A businessman named J. I. Degrandgagnage (since shortened to Degrand) became postmaster in 1891, and was paid \$27.25 that year. In 1893 the office was acquired by Frank Evrard, and business with the growing population

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Meeting at Namur — Near the site of the pioneer Post Office of Namur, in the community now known as Fairland in southern

Door County, plans are told for establishment of a National Belgian Village. The old name of Namur will be restored.



Village Backers — Some of the people working on plans for the Belgian Village, attending a meeting in Alexander's Hall, include (from left) H. J. Quartemont, committee vice president; Mrs. Gene

Alexander and son Gary, and the Rev. Urban De-Cleene, pastor of St. Mary of the Snow Catholic Church. About 75 residents of the community attended the meeting.
(Harmann Photos)

Belgian Village Plans Revealed at Meeting

increased to such an extent that he drew \$211.77 in one 12-month period before Post Office Namur was discontinued.

RFD Was Demise Of Namur Office

Advent of rural free delivery had brought Namur's demise as a Post Office. And designation of the unincorporated hamlet as Namur gradually lapsed. Eventually it became known as Fairland, the same as the local district school.

A year or so ago the proposal for a National Belgian Village became serious consideration. Several people recalled the old Post Office and Quartemont, among others, thought Namur should be restored.

"The first step was adoption of a resolution by the Town of Union, calling attention to the historical significance of the name and requesting its official recognition by the Wisconsin Highway Commission," Quartemont told his audience.

Submitted to L. W. Empey, district engineer in Green Bay, the resolution was relayed to the Highway Commission office in Madison.

"We don't anticipate any difficulty," Empey assured the National Belgian Village committee. "The community is unincorporated, and no objections are likely to be heard."

Will Erect Signs

Empey has indicated that as soon as official sanction is given by the Highway Commission, regulation highway signs proclaiming the name Namur will be erected.

With the name settled, what about the money?

Quartemont didn't admit to any great misgivings. It will, however, require hard work and the enthusiastic moral support of the com-

munity.

R. J. Baudhuin has started a king-size ball rolling with his pledge of \$150,000 toward a home for the aged and retired. A native of the area, Baudhuin's biography reads like a Horatio Alger novel. He is a principal owner and president of the Valspar Corp., a far-flung paint and varnish firm, of Chicago.

Half a Million To Provide Home

"We figure it's going to take half a million to build the home," Hank Quartemont announced, batting not an eye. "It will employ the latest ideas in homes of this type, with individual cottages for couples who want them, and occupational therapy to give our senior citizens the security of usefulness."

Arrangements have been made, he said, for a small order of nuns known as the Servants of Christ the King to operate the home.

"Half a million dollars is a lot of money," Quartemont conceded, "but remember that there are a lot of people of Belgian descent in this country. There are 60,000 in Detroit alone."

There's a good chance, Quartemont went on, that work on the home will begin before the year is over. The Belgian Village already holds option on 40 acres of land.

Other dreams may take a bit longer to materialize.

A Belgian pioneers' museum will become a tourist attraction, Quartemont predicted. Eventually there will be a Belgian cuisine, and a real old-fashioned pioneer Belgian farm. Motels will spring up all over the area.

"Maybe, some day," Quartemont added, "we'll even have a small college here."

There were a few questions, but mostly they listened.

A Town of Union official wondered about the loss of tax revenues on land that would be taken over by a non-profit corporation. Another man answered, and Quartemont agreed, that the business produced by visitors and tourists would be a far greater financial asset to the community.

Pastor Is Pleased

Father Urban DeCleene, pastor of St. Mary of the Snow Catholic Church, expressed his endorsement. It would be fine and fitting, he declared, to preserve the heritage of the Belgian nationality and do something for elderly folk at the same time.

Much more will be heard about the National Belgian Village in the coming months, Quartemont promised. He asserted that enthusiasm is growing day by day.

"All of a sudden," declared the ambassador of Namur, "people are proud they are Belgian!"